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The gentle art of side-stepping

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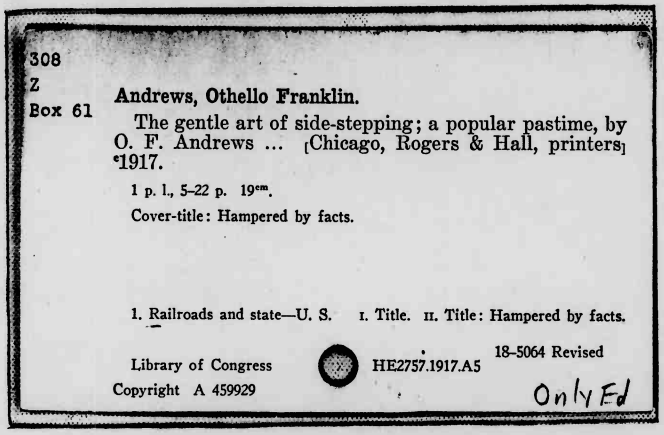

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HAMPERED BY FACTS

THE GENTLE ART OF SIDE-STEPPING

A POPULAR PASTIME

By

O. F. ANDREWS

Railroad Editor the Chicago Examiner, Editor The Business World, University of Michigan, B. L., Northwestern University, Member the Illinois Bar

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By O. F. ANDREWS

IT is embarrassing to be hampered by facts. Shortly after I started as a newspaper reporter I was sent over to a slum district of Chicago's great West Side to get a story of a girl who was alleged to have been whipped by her father and put out of the house. I rushed to find the girl, as that part of the story appealed to me, and located her in the house of a neighbor. She told me a pitiful tale of mistreatment at the hands of her father. The girl was about 18 and quite fair to look upon, and this increased my desire to get her story in print as quickly as possible. I rushed back to the city editor loaded with the emotion of the case. When I finished telling him about it he asked me what the father had said.

"I did not bother to see him because the girl's story was bad enough," I replied.

"Well, every reader of this newspaper tomorrow morning will want to know what the father had to say in answer to the daughter's charge, so go back and find him and get his side of the story."

My heart fell because I was afraid of being hampered by facts, that something might come from the other side that would spoil my pretty sob story. I found the father and he said he had never mistreated the girl, that she had run away from home and that he had tried to get her to come back. Later the girl confessed that she had become hysterical over some minor disappointment, and concocted the story about her father.

Newspapers are not always so careful, particularly along political lines. I remember of an editor telling a reporter to get busy on a story of financial graft in the City Hall. I met the reporter as he was going to write the story and I asked him if he had gone through the books of the city department to be charged.

"No," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

"I'm afraid," he returned; "I want to write a good story and don't want to be hampered by facts."

In justice to the newspaper business, however, the first incident better illustrates the general principles prevailing in American journalism.

Apparently there is a percentage of the American public that in this railroad question is afraid of being hampered by facts.

It is difficult to ocularly see two objects at the same time. It is equally trying to mentally look at both sides of a case. American people are quick, adaptable, and mentally alert, and it follows that they are given to quick opinions and ready prejudices. Probably our intense commercial activity has caused us individually to train ourselves to see only one side of any case because it might be disconcerting financially to see the other side. The one gasping exception is the lawyer who has been trained to stand on the fence and survey the premises on either side, but he, too, is coming to be affected by our business atmosphere and is being given to prejudging.

On the railroad question Americans have reached a high state of one sided thinking, of seeing only half the picture.

It is not easy, either, for us adaptable Americans to drop our seventy-five-year-old grouch against public carriers and treat the subject humanely.

One of my old law professors used to say:

"Few men are capable of looking questions squarely in the face. Many try, but unconsciously all waver to some extent to one side or another."

Perhaps it is well that nature did not equip us mentally to weigh the perfectly balanced

scales. Perhaps we would become blanks with too much balancing and the mind itself would wabble.

So to save our reason we must take sides.

But if such a theory is recognized we could, at least, take both sides, one at a time, for the purpose of minimizing the difficulty of getting at a clear understanding of a question as big as that of the railroads.

Nobody is exempt from a charge of prejudice one way or another. The railway president in his way is prejudiced, and the legislator, labor man, shipper, and passenger have at times equally narrow visions.

The writer, schooled in law and newspaper work and with close relationship to railroad men, has shared the anti-railroad feeling.

But there comes a time in the history of all institutions when radical action is necessary to clean house, and such housecleaning has been going on for twelve years in the passage of laws regulating railroads. But in this housecleaning many new questions have risen that call for side sweeps and subdivisions of housecleaning. This renovating process to date has been largely directed to one class, but the public must now begin to sweep away some of its mental cobwebs, those which have been allowed to form and interfere with efficient railroad service.

Everything has a day of reckoning.

The public and the carriers must listen to one another's story.

There must be a discussionary ground, at least if common carriers are to continue as private corporations.

Many believe that the government that governs least governs best.

When the writer toured Germany a year before the war the magnificent operation of the government owned railroads was a revelation, but the absolute disregard for passengers was also a revelation. Trains were operated at great speed and with wonderful adherence to schedules, double tracks, rock ballast everywhere, and fine equipment.

One might set his watch by a train in Germany, but when it came to service to the public there was a famine.

There was no printed information.

If you desired to know about a district or a train you went down to the railway station and tried to figure out the information from a big cold blackboard in the waiting room. Ask a station attache and he would point to the blackboard. This was also true of the government owned railroads in France and Belgium.

But immediately you crossed the English Channel what a change! Your London train

awaits you at the dock at Folkestone, while half a dozen passenger agents of as many competing roads, with their arms full of literature, tip their hats and ask if they can be of service to you.

In all the great London terminals the most conspicuous feature was the information bureau at which elaborately printed and instructive booklets, covering resorts, districts, hotels, and commercial territory, were given with a smile and without cost.

There was no racial reason for the difference in service, the Germans and French are just as polite as the English, it was merely competition versus non-competition.

Government ownership in the United States will turn on one or both of two points:

Passenger service and strikes.

I say strikes rather than the labor question because as long as a point is settled without inconvenience to the public the people are not concerned to the voting point.

The masses, the people who vote and elect legislators and congressmen, care little about freight rates and they are equally apathetic about wage controversies as long as trains are not stopped by such controversies.

The railroads will sell to the government or continue to co-operate semi-privately, just as the public pleases. But if they are to continue

as quasi-public corporations, they must give service, and to give service we must be reasonable in the allowance of rates.

Legislators must consider their constituents by allowing a reasonable return to transportation companies, that in turn will allow service to these constituents.

Future labor leaders must be men broad enough to look at both sides of a case.

Rail managers must have equally good vision.

Railroad service is the prime demand of the American people.

Railway investors rightfully want dividends.

To get dividends the railroads must give service.

Conclusion, the railroads will give service if they are allowed a decent profit for the purpose.

Do you know of an American railroad that is paying a dividend that is not giving satisfactory service?

Further, does not the character of the service rise as dividends advance?

A railroad paying no dividend is giving no service or is giving the service in spite of the heavy interest rate due to old time poor financing.

And you know there can be no more poor financing or get-rich-quick railroad schemes because all issues of securities must now be passed upon by the public utilities commissions.

One of the threatening features, particularly as it relates to railroad affairs oday, is the conflict of laws among states, and between the several states and the government.

I am a states' rights man.

I believe in the family, and the groups, or separate units of government.

A cable, because of its separate strands, is stronger than a solid bar.

In the cable the separate strands co-operate with one another and make the whole uniform and strong. The separate states should co-operate to make the national government equally strong.

Everybody knows that Congress has only such power as has been delegated to it by the several states and that state legislatures have every power except what they have given to Congress.

One of the drags of the American political system is localism.

Each community, municipality, and state is run selfishly in regard to the rights of other states, and of the federal government.

In this line it would seem that the constitutional provision on his point is being overworked.

This localism is making a football of the railroads.

If the public is to get service, and that is all there is to the railroad question, there must be uniformity of state laws and I believe the public would profit if the listing of securities, labor matters, and rates were turned over to the federal government.

There would be no danger in this, for if the experiment was not satisfactory, the power could be turned back to the states.

Some of the most ardent states' rights advocates I have ever met have, after study, modified their views in favor of further federalization.

We must zealously guard the necessary powers of the states, but American extremes can go too far in any direction and right now I think we are suffering from over assertion of states' rights; that we are losing by too much localization.

Power has seldom been used wisely.

When governments or men acquire too much power they must be summarily curbed.

Rome went down through the weight of its surplus power.

Napoleon's power threatened, and he was put out of the way.

And the person or thing with too much power cannot be argued with; he or it will never acknowledge they have any too much power.

But the people know when a person or institution is becoming too strong and the people quickly recognize and promptly destroy the menace.

Handing Queen Victoria an act passed by Parliament for her signature, Gladstone said:

"Here is the measure Your Majesty must sign."

"Must sign? Do you forget I am the Queen?"

"Yes, but do you forget that I am the people?" England's greatest commoner replied.

In America the power danger is not governmental but economic.

Neither capital nor labor has ever conceded the possession of too much power.

Both have been guilty of the charge.

Capital was guilty when it was indulging in the reckless issue of securities and when the formation of combinations was at its height.

The people dissolved the Northern Securities Company, ended the Union Pacific-Southern Pacific merger, unscrambled the Standard Oil Company and cleaned up irregular life insurance management.

Labor has also reached the danger line in

power in several instances, the most notable to my mind being that of the teamsters' strike in Chicago in 1905.

They backed a strike called by another union in violation of an arbitration clause.

The power of the teamsters was corralled by the people of Chicago, and there is no doubt that when the power of other organizations is used without regard for public welfare, and for selfish ends only, that the public will find a means of protecting itself.

But too much power always reacts and leaves its possessors weaker than they were before the possession of such power.

The public is not keeping books on power as it ascends, but the public knows and acts when power ascends too high.

The English speaking race is strong for the jury system. It was born as a result of centuries of Star Chamber sessions and one man decisions.

When the feudal system was overthrown in England one man rule ended, and in the Thirteenth century, 200 years after the first courts of record, the idea of having several of one's peers pass judgment came into being.

And the idea has been growing ever since.

Now and then a law student has a spasm and advocates the abolition of the jury system, asks that everything be left to the learned judges.

But the suggestion seldom gets beyond the stage of academic discussion.

Even the worst defeated lawyer down in his heart believes in the jury system.

Arbitration is a form of the jury system.

There is nothing the American people are stronger for than arbitration.

Every time labor or capital refuses to arbitrate they slip back just so much in public opinion.

There is no question but that there was awakened a feeling of resentment throughout the country when certain labor organizations recently refused, at the request of the government, speaking for the majority, to submit their cause to arbitration—"the rule of reason." This attitude can hardly be attributed to any reason other than fear and a doubt as to the justice of their demands.

There is nothing in common between capital and labor.

Capital buys its help as low as it can.

Labor sells its products as high as it can.

But the third element, arbitration, steps in and adjusts the two demands.

Twenty-five or thirty years ago physical improvement of the properties was about the last thing directors and stockholders of many railroads thought of.

Here and there owners of a railroad began to really better their lines with the idea of making them investments rather than speculations.

The idea of making a railroad an investment rather than a gamble was a new idea in those times and grew rather slowly at the start.

But the improved properties began to be FELT by the communities and resulted in increases in business until gradually competing lines realized that a speculative proposition was a poor investment.

In spite of this, however, the speculative element continued in the saddle and made life a burden for the good roads.

Then followed the period of cut rate competition between the "goods" and the "bads."

The lines that were in the hands of speculators were little more than two streaks of rust, but they were strong enough to carry freight cars, and secret rebates and cut rates did the rest.

This condition placed the poor roads on a parity with the good lines, and the latter had nothing to hope for until legislators passed laws estopping secret rebates.

This finally happened with the passage of the Hepburn law in 1907. It was drastic and was intended to be so.

There was an awful shaking of dry bones,

but at last the good roads had come into their own.

This was the beginning of the end of all speculation in railroad properties.

It was the dawn of a bright era not only for the good roads, but also for the public, and eventually for the bad boys of the transportation world.

Then followed the laws requiring the O. K. of public utilities commissions on issues of railway securities.

Now the good railroad systems began to shine. Their superior roadbeds, up-to-date equipment and high-class management captured the bulk of the traffic.

Naturally the gamblers' day was over, and the attention of the poor railroad owners was turned to the improving of their properties, of placing theirs on a parity with the other lines.

In the ten years intervening since the passage of the Hepburn law, the railroads have worked night and day on their properties, realizing that service could only come to roads in good physical condition.

Does the average railroad baiter consider what has been done by the railroads during the period named?

If a survey is made, one finds that of the seven railroads operating between Chicago and

New York, only half the distance of one of these roads is now single-tracked.

Between Chicago and the Missouri river only three out of eight roads are single-tracked, and these three do not go beyond the Missouri river. That in two instances the double track extends between 500 and 1,000 miles west of the Missouri river.

Regardless of what you think of railroad management, you must concede that railroads have put more money back into their properties in twelve years than has any other line of industry.

Railroads, of course, make more with good systems, and the public benefits in even-tempered service.

In this connection it would seem that employes should be grateful for this, because the reduction of grades, elimination of curves and the multiplication of tracks and better roadbeds not only makes railroading safer but pleasanter.

In the line of rates, I agree with the recent expression of a president of an Eastern railroad that passenger fares should be one cent a mile and freight rates advanced 10 per cent.

But can shippers be induced to contribute this 10 per cent?

An increase of 10 per cent in freight rates spread over a carload shipment would be so small it could not be traced to the consumer.

That is the fact.

But the various shippers' organizations throughout the country would rise and cry that the consumer would pay the bill, and thus crush any suggestion of a freight increase.

But the shipper would not bear the increase, because such increase figured down to any one article of consumption would be too small to compute.

This infinitesimal amount would be taken care of by trade competition.

But, of course, chairmen of the shippers' organizations usually protest rather than consider principles of equity.

But he who asks equity must give equity.

And this goes for the railroad manager, the labor leader, legislator, the public.

The American people form the world's greatest jury. I will not attempt to say that the public, the people, is always right, in fact, I think history shows popular verdicts to have been often reversed by the same populace that rendered them. But the point sought to be made is that the public, the people, right or wrong, is the inevitable American board of arbitration, and those who reckon without this board are not in touch with the collective American temperament.

1917 RAILROADING

"Where is the big chief of your road?"
I asked the office boy,
Who seemed to bear an awful load
For a freckled office boy.

"Gone down to Wash'n'ton," he said,
"To see de main gazabe—
"Who? Wilson, That Is All—not Ted,
"Who was de main gazabe."

"And where are your vice-presidents?"
"In court," replied the lad,
"Or at de judge's residence"—
Ah, such a lovely lad.

"And where's your general Counsel?"
He grinned in rare good nature—
"He's busy wit' de city council,
Or else de legislature."

"And can you tell me, boy," I sighed,
"Where is your land department?"
"Out West; more taxes," he replied,
"Tax suits our land department."

"Then where's your operating forces?"
"They're out arguin' over wages,
"And fightin' car blockades, you know,
"But mostly raisin' wages."

"Then let me see a traffic man."
"There's none nowhere in sight.
"De I. C. C., you understand—
"Our tariff sheet's a sight."

"Who runs this railroad, anyway?"
A sad light filled his eye.
"It runs itself," he sobbed, "and, say—
"It's runnin' loose. Good-bye."

F. A. M.

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